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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effect of a set of predictors of success in both the undergraduate English program and in all other subjects. Academic data for the graduates of an Arab university's English department during three years were analyzed. The predictor variables examined were: (1) total scores on the secondary school certificate examination, (2) scores on the English test in the same examination, (3) grades in the four university-level introductory courses in English, and (4) averages in the four university-level introductory Arabic courses. University academic success was measured by the students' cumulative averages in English at the university and their general cumulative averages. The results indicated that neither the student's total score nor the English-language score on the secondary certificate examination had significant power to predict general or English-language success at the university, but that college-level English and Arabic grades did have significant predictive power. The findings argue for a revision of current admission policy to place more emphasis on university-level introductory English and Arabic performance and less on secondary school performance alone. An abstract in Arabic is included. (Author/MSE)

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Towards Formulating an Educational Admission Policy for English Majors at Arab Universities: A Case Study

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Towards Formulating an Educational Admission Policy for English Majors at Arab Universities: A Case Study

Khalid Omari Muhammad Zughoul

Abstract

The unsatisfactory level of achievement of the average English major graduate of Arab universities has provoked the reconsideration of admission policies to these departments. Within this frame of reference, this study aimed at investigating the effect of a set of pridictors on success in English particular and success in all subjects in general.

The set of predictors included a) the student's total score in all the subjects on the Secondary School Certificate Examination (Tawjihi), b) the student's score in English as a subject in the same exam, c) the student's average in the four introductory English courses usually offered at the university level and d) the student's average in the four introductory Arabic courses usually offered at the university level. Two criteria for success were considered: the student's English cumulative average at the university and his general cumulative average (GPA).

All the graduates (268) of the English Department for three consecutive years were the subjects of this study. Step-wise multiple regression analysis technique was employed to analyze the data.

The results indicated that neither the student's total score in Tawjihi nor his score in English as a subject in it had significant predictive power for success in general or success in English in particular; whereas his average in the Arabic and English introductory courses had significant predictive power for that success. This conclusion calls for a revision of the present admission policies for English majors, where due consideration is to be given to linguistic aptititude as indicated by the student's averages on the introductory courses in Arabic and English offered at the university level rather than wholly relying on high school results.

ملخص

" نحو رسم سياسة تربوية للقبول في تخصص
الانجليزية في الجامعات العربية : دراسة حاله

خالد العمري*

محمد الزغول*

لقد ادى التذمر من تدني مستوى خريجي دوائر الانجليزيه في الجامعات العربيه الى الدعوه لاعادة النظر في سياسات قبول الطلبة في هذه الدوائر ،ضمن هذا الاطار، هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تقصي اثر مجموعة من المتغيرات التنبؤيه للنجاح في دراسة الانجليزيه بشكل خاص ،والنجاح في الدراسة الجامعيه بشكل عام .

اشتملت هذه المتغيرات على :-

أ. مجموع علامات الطالب في امتحان شهادة الدراسة الثانويه العامه (التوجيهي).
ب. علامة الطالب في اللغه الانجليزيه كمبحث في هذا الامتحان .
ج. معدل الطالب في مساقات(مقررات) اللغه الانجليزيه الاوليه ،والتي تعطى عادة في السنة الجامعية الاولى.
د. معدل الطالب في مساقات (مقررات) اللغه العربيه الاوليه ،والتي تعطى في السنه الجامعيه الاولى.

أما متغير النجاح فقد وضع له محكّان: تمثل الاول بمعدل الطالب المتخرج التراكمي في جميع مساقات الانجليزيه ،وتمثل الثاني بمعدله التراكمي العام في الجامعه .

تكونت العينه من جميع خريجي دائرة اللغه الانجليزيه في جامعة اليرموك لثلاث سنوات متتاليه من (١٩٧٩ - ١٩٨١) ،وعددهم (٢٦٨) طالبا وطالبة ،وقد استخدمت طريقة تحليل الانحدار المتعدد المتدرج لمعالجة البيانات احصائيا .

دلت النتائج على عدم وجود قوه تنبؤيه دالة احصائيا لنجاح الطالب بشكل عام او نجاحه في التخصص يمكن ان تعزى لمجموع علامات الطالب في امتحان التوجيهي ،او لعلامته في اللغه الانجليزيه في هذا الامتحان ،في حين دلت هذه النتائج على ان معدل الطالب في مساقات اللغه العربيه او الانجليزيه التي يأخذها الطالب عادة في السنة الجامعية الاولى كان له قوة تنبؤيه دالة احصائيا في هذا النجاح.

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تدعو هذه النتائج الى اعادة النظر في سياسات القبول المعمول بها حاليا في الجامعات العربيه لتأخذ بعين الاعتبار القدرات اللغويه للطلبة في السنة الجامعيه الاولى في ضوء قدرة مقررات اللغه العربيه والانجليزيه الاساسيه في التنبؤ في النجاح في الدراسة الجامعيه بشكل عام وفي دراسة التخصص بشكل خاص .

Towards Formulating an Educational Admission Policy for English Majors at Arab Universities: A Case Study

Introduction

With the growing number of universities in the Arab region, one major problem that has been begging for rigorus treatment is that of reformulating admission policies in these universities. This issue has been one of the main subjects of the last two annual conferences of the Arab ACRAO - the Arab Association for Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers - held in Tunisia and Amman in 1983 and in 1984. Both of the two conferences strongly recommended a revision of the existing admission policies which wholly rely on the results of students in a general public secondary school examination. Such results have been assumed as reliable predictors of university students' academic performance.

However, research done in this regard has not provided enough evidence to support this assumption. Many studies both locally and internationally have focussed on the study of the high school general exam results as predictors of achievement at the university level (Scannel, 1960; Fernands and Gajjer, 1964; Holtsman and Brown, 1968; Astin, 1971; Billeh, et al, 1974; Audeh, 1982; Omari, et al, 1985; Tawfiq, et al, 1983; Jaradat, et al, 1984). The findings of these studies were conflicting: some claimed the existence of a significant relationship between high school general exam results and university achievement whereas other studies denied such relationship. Values of correlation coefficients in these studies varied between 0.17 and 0.70.

In response to this need, it is imperative to investigate the effect of a host of other variables that might have a bearing on student performance at the university level. There is no doubt that the selection of such variables is contingent upon the field of specialization, since each field has a peculiar set of variables affecting student performance in it. A student's scores in chemistry, physics and mathematics in the high school examination, for example, may be more valid criteria for admission to the colleges of natural and applied sciences than his scores in other subjects. In the same manner, his scores in Arabic or English are expected to be more relevant criteria to predict his success in the school of Arts.

As a step in this direction, this study aims at studying the effect of a set of variables on academic performance of students in the English Department at Yarmouk University. Before this issue is treated, it would be revealing to have a look at the place of English as a foreign language in the Arab academic institutions as well as in the Arab society.

English has been acquiring increasing importance as the international language of science, technology, banking, aviation, medicine and communication at large world-wide. It is the only foreign language taught at the school level in most of the Arab countries and used as the medium of instruction at university level especially in the schools of science, engineering and medicine. In a number of studies, English has been proved to have a high positive relationship with both occupational and educational mobility in the Arab society (Harison et al, 1975; Zughoul, et al, 1979; Zughoul and Taminian, 1984; Zughoul, 1985). Competence in this language remains a pre-requisite if not an indispensable asset for those seeking higher - status jobs especially in the private sector in the Arab World.

The "instrumentality" of English may account for the staggering figures of students enrolling at the English departments of Arab universities. An example of this trend may be taken from Yarmouk University in Jordan which started with an enrollment of 600 students in 1976. By 1985, the English department alone has a student body of 1600. This applies to a number of other Arab universities. English as a major area of study seems likely to continue attracting more and more students as long as English continues to play such a key role in the job market and in education.

The language proficiency of the average graduate of the English department of an Arab University has been judged to be far from being satisfactory,. Professors of these departments and researchers often voice their dissatisfaction with the quality of English department graduates. Jawad (1982), for example, gives the English departments at Arab Universities as a particular example of the "astronomical failiure " of these universities in their contribution to a rising graphic line to indicate quality of graduates or excellence of research. Abu Hamdia (1982) solicited the views of employers in a follow up study of the graduates of the English department of the University of Jordan and concluded that the preparation of those graduates was inadequate. Zughoul (1984) administered the Michigan Test of English language Proficiency to 168 graduates of the English department at Yarmouk University. He found out that their average equated score was 67.75, which was interpreted in the test manual as " not proficient enough to take any academic work".

In this context, improving the standards of English department graduates at Arab universities has recently become an issue of serious concern to these

departments as well as to educational planners in the Arab World. Reference can be made to four major conferences [1] that have been held at four Arab Universities to discuss the issues of standards in addition to other English language and literature teaching issues. One central idea for improving these standards has always been concerned with the admission policies of the departments and the screening of their increasing enrollment.

Design and Procedure

This study aims at investigating a hypothesized set of predictors for success in English at the university level. It also aims at identifying the extent to which each of those predictors contributes in explaining the variance in student success. The criteria for success were defined as : a) the cumulative English average of the graduating student (EMA) and b) his general cumulative average in all courses he had taken during his university study (GPA,i.e. Grade Point Average).

For this purpose the following variables were identified and included in the study.

I Dependent Variables(Criteria)

a) English Major Average(EMA): The cumulative average of the student in all the English courses he has taken at the university.

b) Grade point Average(GPA): The cumulative average of the student

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1) The four conferences were held at the universities of Ain Shams, Gairo, Jordan and the United Arab Emirate in Al-Aayn during 1982.

in all the courses he has taken at the university.

II Independent Variables(Predictors)

a) Arabic Average(AA): The average of the student in Arabic courses designated as university requirements (101, 102, 103, 104).

b) English Average (EA): The average of the student in four basic English courses(101, 102, 103, 104), which was used as a criterion for students admission to the Englisn department. English 101 and English 102 are designed to enhance the four linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; whereas English 103 and English 104 were designed to teach language skills through literature(short stories, poems and short plays).

c) High School English Average (HSEA): The score of the student in English as a subject in the General Secondary School Certificate Exam. Such a score has always been proposed to be the sole criterion for admission into the English department.

d) High School Total (HST): The student's total score in all the subjects of the General Secondary School Certificate Exam(Tawjihi). This score has been used as the sole criterion for admission into various departments and/or Colleges of most of the Arab universities.

In Summary,six variables were included in this study as follows:

1)	EMA	2)	AA	3)	EA
4)	GPA	5)	HSEA	6)	HST

Those variables were employed to formulate four major hypotheses:

Hypothesis (I) : There is no statistically significant relationship between the student's English major average (EMA), on one side, and the following variables: (AA), (EA), (HSEA), (HST), all combined on the other side.

Hypothesis (II): There is no significant contribution for any of the four variables mentioned in hypotesis I in explaining the variance in EMA.

Hypothesis (III): There is no statistically significant relationship between the student's overall cumulative average (GPA), on one side, and the following variables: (AA), (EA), (HSEA), (HST), all combined on the other side.

Hypothesis (IV): There is no significant contribution for any of the four variables in explaining the variance in GPA.

The sample of the study consists of all the graduates (261students) of the English department at Yarmouk University for the years 1979, 1980 and 1981 . They form the whole population of graduates till that time. The subjects are mostly graduates of Jordanian high schools, of an average age of 22 year. They had an average total in the General Secondary School Certificate Exam of 785 with a standard deviation of 54 .

The data on all the variables were obtained and / or calculated from the students' records available at the Department of Admissions and Registration at Yarmouk University. The data were fed into the computer and the multiple regression analysis (step- wise method) was employed to analyze the variance for testing the four hypotheses.

Multiple regression analysis is a statistical technique usually employed to test for the significance of the common variance between a dependent variable on one side and a set of independent variables on the other. Besides, it helps to determine the significance of the contribution of each independent variable in explaining the variance of the dependent variable.

Results

Table I below provides the means and standard deviations for the six variables included in the study.

Table I
Means and standard deviations of the six variables for 261 cases

Variable	EMA	AA	EA	GPA	HSEA	HST
Mean	73.4	75.9	75.4	74.6	78.2	785.5
St.d.	6.6	5.6	6.2	4.8	9.1	54.0

Table II below is a correlation matrix for the six variables included in the study.

Table II
Correlation Coefficients Matrix for the six variables of the study

	EMA	AA	EA	GPA	HSEA	HST
(EMA)	1.00	0.49	.46	.75	.20	.27
(AA)	0.49	1.00	.40	.62	.26	.41
(EA)	0.46	0.40	1.000	.57	.34	.26
(APA)	0.75	0.62	.57	1.00	.24	.39
(HSEA)	0.20	.26	.34	.24	1.00	.47
(HST)	0.27	.41	.26	.39	.47	1.00

Note: All coefficients are significant at α = .01

A look at table II shows that all correlation coefecients are statistically significant at $\alpha = .01$ (critical value r = .16 for 261 subjects). The highest correlation in the table is that between EMA and GPA (r = .75), neither of which; however, could be considered a predictor of the other. The criterion EMA correlated most highly with AA (r = .49) and with EA (r = .47). Similarly the criterion GPA correlated most highly with AA (r = .63) and with EA (r = .58). At the same time both EMA and GPA have low correlation coefficients with HST and HSEA, though significant. In other words, it seems that EMA and GPA might be better predicted by the introductory Arabic and English university courses than by the high school general exam results.

Table II I below is a summary of the step - wise multiple regression analysis for the first hypothesis.

Table III
Summary Table of the Step - wise Multiple Regression Analysis. Hypothesis I.

Variable	R	R2	F observed	F critical	Degrees of freedom
(AA)	.494	.244	83.7	6.7	(1,259)
(EA)	.576	.332	64.00	4.7	(2,258)
(HST)	.577	.333	42.00	3.8	(3,257)
(HSEA)	.577	.333	32.00	3.4	(4,256)

This table indicates that the common variance (R2 = .333) between EMA and the four variables introduced in the above order is statistically significant.

The observed value of F (32) is greater than the critical value of F (3.4) at α = .01 and degrees of freedom 4,256 . Accordingly, hypothesis I was not accepted. That is, there is a significant relationship between the English major average on one side and the four independent variables (AA, EAA, HST , HSEA) combined on the other. These variable explained .333 of the variance in the English major average.

The contribution of each of the four variables to the common (explained) variance is shown in Table IV .

Table IV .
Analysis of The Contribution of Each Variable to the Common (explained) Variance. Hypothesis II

Variable	R2	R2	F observed	F critical	Degrees fo freedom
(AA)	.244	.244	83.7	6.7	(1,259)
(EA)	.332	.088	33.6	6.7	(1,258)
(HST)	.333	.001	0.56	6.7	(1,257)
(HSEA)	.333	.000	0.05	6.7	(1,256)

Table IV indicates that the values of F observed are greater than the values of F critical (α = .01) for (AA) and (EA) only. This means that the second hypothesis is not accepted, and two of the four variables have significant contribution to the common(explained) variance. In specific, AA and EA explained .244 and .088 of the variance in the English major average (EMA) respectively. On the other hand, (HST)

and (HSEA) both failed to contribute significantly to this variance. This implies that these two variables could have been excluded from the regression equation without effecting the outcome.

This result is surprising , for it questions the validity of the two major criteria Arab universities usually use for admission to the English departments; namely, (HST) and (HSEA), and suggests two other criteria as better predictors of success in English; namely, (AA) and (EA). This result will be discussed in detail later.

Table V below is a summary of the step-wise multiple regression analysis for the 3rd hypothesis.

Table V
Summary Table of the Step-wise Multiple Regression
Ayalysis. Hypothesis III.

Variable	R	R2	F observed	F critical	Degrees of freedom
(AA)	.626	.392	166.6	6.7	(1,259)
(EA)	.720	.518	138.9	4.7	(2,258)
(HST)	.728	.531	96.6	3.8	(3,257)
(HSEA)	.730	.533	73.0	3.4	(4,256)

This table shows that hypothesis III is not accepted, which means that there is a significant relationship between the student's cumulative average (GPA) at the university level and the four independent variables under investigation as combined in the above order. As indicated, the amount of variance in GPA

explained by these four variables is .533 a significant value at α = .01.

To what extent does each of the four variables contribute to the common (explained) variance., Table VI shows the extent of each contribution.

Table VI
Ayalysis of the Contribution of Each Variable to the Common (explained) Variance. Hypothesis IV.

Varaiable	R2	Δ R2	F observed	F critical	Degrees of freedom
(AA)	.392	.392	166.6	6.7	(1,259)
(EA)	.518	.126	68.0	6.7	(1,258)
(HST)	.531	.013	6.4	6.7	(1,257)
(HSEA)	.533	.002	1.6	6.7	(1,256)

An examining look at table VI shows that the values of F observed are greater than the values of F critical (α = .01) for AA and EA only. This means that the fourth hypothesis is not supported, and that only two of the four variables have significant contribution to the common (explained) variance. In specific, AA and EA explained .392 and .126 of the variance in (GPA). On the other hand HST and HSEA both failed to add significantly to this variance. This implies that these two variables could have been excluded from the regression equation without affecting the results. These results are consistent with those of the second hypothesis, where the contribution of (AA) and (EA) was significant in contrast to that of (HST) and (HSEA) in explaining the variance of either (EMA) or (GPA).

Discussion and Conclusion

In Summary, the results of this study fall into two major points. First, neither the General Secondary School Examination total score (HST) of a student nor his score on English as a subject in this exam (HSEA) seems to have appreciable predictive power for student's success in all university subjects in general or in English as a major in particular. Second, the averages of the student in the four basic Arabic courses (AA) and in the four basic English courses (EA) seem to have significant predictive power in such success.

These results bring into question the validity of relying wholly on the HST and / or HSEA (as has been recently proposed) as the major criteria for admission to the English department at Arab Universities, and call for considering other criteria for this purpose. This result lends further support to earlier research studies on this issue as those of Jaradat et al, 1984; Omari et al , Forthcoming; Tawfiq et al, 1983. More reasonable criteria, this research suggests, are the (AA) and the (EA) which are usually known at the end of the first year of study at a university.

The unexpected failure of the high school exam to predict achievement at the university level could be attributed to both the nature of this exam and the academic set up at the university. Jaradat et al (1984), for example, state that the General Secondary School Certificate Exam is a test on a limited number of subjects given over one year and corrected anonymously. The students maintain high motivation because of the decisive nature of the test on their future career. In contrast, the final results of a student at the university depend upon a great number of courses taught by different instructors,

and evaluated in various ways over four years of study with different levels of motivation. Moreover, the way in which the high school test is constructed (with respect to its validity and reliability) and the scaling (push up) process both reflect on the degree of correlation between this test and university achievement.

Another way of looking at these results is to consider the possiblility that there is a wide gap between high school preperation and university study especially in English. These results suggest the presense of discontinuity and incongruence between the high school curriculum and that of the university.

On the other hand, the significant predictive power of AA and EA , identified by this study, for student's success at the university level may be attributed to the fact that languages are of direct relevance to the nature of training in Arts. In addition, controlling the area of specialization, one tends to conclude that success in languages (Arabic and English) might be a strong predictor of success in that area at the university level. The Arabic average in relation to success in English might seem irrelevent or unrealistic for the observer at first. However, it is not necessarily so when the postulated linguistic aptitude is considered. The nature of Arabic, a language which has two varieties at least - classical vs. colloquial- implies that a student who is successful in classical Arabic, the variety which is taught at the university, tends to be successful in his English studies. Nevertheless, issues related to linguistic aptitude are far too controversial to be discussed here.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the researchers recommend that admission policies of Arab universities should not continue to depend on the General Secondary School Exam usually held at the end of the high school.

In this direction it is proposed that AA and EA or their equivalents such as a language aptitude test be used and tested as criteria for admission to the English department at Arab Universities. Similarly, it is recommended that for each field of specialization a number of primary courses should be decided upon to use their scores as an additional criterion for majoring in that field.

However, one should not overlook the fact that the primary courses in the case of this study (AA, and EA) explained only, 0.33 of the variance in EMA and, 0.53 of the variance in GPA. This indicates that future studies should identify and include other variables which may account for the unexplained variance. Examples of such variables are: socio-economic status, intelligence, motivation and attitudes.

There is no doubt that the population of this study at large is hypothetical in nature since it is supposed to include a continuous flow of prospective graduates for the coming years. Accordingly the generaliz_ability of these results has to be validated by similar follow up studies.

Finally, the researchers call up for further research to validate these results for other fields of specialations focusing on variables relevant to these fields. The school results for the last three years of the secondary cycle have been proposed as partial criteria for university admission by the Arab ACRAO, a proposal which is worth researching

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